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Response Paper 4, “*Beloved*”

One of the many major themes of *Beloved* is the exploration of the dynamic relationship between mother and child. Throughout the book it is apparent the negative effects that a Sethe’s guilt and remorse had on the family of 124. But the question the book alludes to is why was Beloved killed and not Denver. It is clearly visible in the book that Denver is not the center of attention in the home but rather the spirit of the late Beloved. At some points in the book we get to see why both Sethe and Denver accept the presence and possible reincarnation of Beloved.

But another theme that chapter 16 made apparent was “self worth” when it came to a human being. At one point in the story Sethe is caught during the aftermath of her killing and harming her children and Sethe’s Sweet Home owner, the school teacher, came to collect his property meaning Sethe and her children. Sethe was reduced into becoming someone’s object, to school teacher she was nothing more than a lost and need to be found item. This act of depersonalization draws attention to the hardships and strife slaves faced during this time. I believe it was Toni Morrison’s intention to show what the human psyche had become during the time period of slavery and shortly after its abolishment. The idea of separating the fact that a person is alive, has feelings, and thoughts but is only different because of their skin tone is enough reason to make it a validating point to ignore those human characteristics and reduce a person to the self worth of an object. An example of that was when the school teacher left 124 frustrated because he dubbed his property, meaning Sethe and her children, as worthless to him.

Another major theme that is presented in *Beloved* is the importance of literacy. Language is the universal tool that helps us as human beings communicate. During slavery and exhibited by *Beloved* there is a stagnation in the ability to communicate with one another. During the story many newly escaped or released slaves did not have the ability to read or write. This disturbance in the ability to communicate not only would create a cultural stagnation among the oppressed population but also create a time gap of inactivity and societal growth. An example of this concept of fractured communication skills is exhibited in *Beloved* when Paul D was unable to read the story about Sethe’s past that was presented by Stamp Paid. Even when there was a picture of Sethe, Paul D refused to believe it was her because there was a disconnect between how he conceptualizes Sethe and how the picture depicted her. Stamp Paid was able to read the article to Paul D, but Paul D did not receive the entire message because Stamp Paid chose to leave certain pieces of information out. This shows that people who were literate had some degree of power over those who were not.

In conclusion, *Beloved* has many major themes that contributed to the development of the story and its characters. *Beloved* explores dynamic relationship between mother and child, the concept of “self worth” when it comes to human beings, and the importance of literacy among society. It is because of these contributory factors the story *Beloved* has such depth and historical reference.